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Description

Method for the production of organic solar cells or photodetectors

The invention concerns the production of organic solar cells, particularly of polymer-based construction.

The typical cell structure of a solar cell is comprised of a layer structure that includes a positive electrode, a mixture of organic semiconductors and a negative electrode. The material used for the positive electrode can, for example, be ITO/PEDOT:PSS. The semiconductor mixture is composed of an organic material, for example a polymer. The semiconductor mixture includes both n-conductive and p-conductive semiconductor molecules. This mixed semiconductor layer is known as a bulk heterojunction layer. Additional materials that are used concern the negative electrode, for example, which can be made of Ca/Ag or LiF/Al. The above-listed substances do not, however, exclusively constitute the elements concerned, but rather, other material combinations are also feasible. The donor present in the bulk mixed layer can for example be a conjugated polymer, and the acceptor can for example be a soluble methanofullerene.

A major difficulty in the production of bulk heterojunction solar cells is to create a desirable phase morphology with respect to the n-semiconductor and the p-semiconductor. This problem is due, among other things, to the different solubility of the individual components in the common solvent.

Attempts have heretofore been made to obtain the desired morphology using only one solvent, which dissolves the organic semiconductors used in a way that permits the fabrication of suitably thick and homogeneous, well-blended semiconductor films.

The choice of solvents is very limited, owing to the particularly high requirements imposed on them. For example, it is desirable for the formation of a concentration gradient in the distribution of the semiconductors in the so-called bulk to be accompanied by a suitable morphology for the semiconductor mixture in the applied film. The choice of solvent is also particularly limited, for example, by phase separation within the range of the exciton diffusion length [1].

Alternatively, geometries created by the successive application of the individual semiconductor layers have heretofore been investigated. Such attempts have included the use of a so-called bilayer with a sharp interface between the two semiconductors [2]. A "stratified multilayer" has also been developed [3]. This involves the formation of interdiffusion layers in which the upper layer is able to penetrate slightly into the lower layer. This leads to partial interleaving or mixing by diffusion.

The object of the invention is to specify a production method for an organic solar cell by means of which a bulk heterojunction mixed layer can be formed.

This object is achieved by means of the combination of features specified in Claim 1. Advantageous configurations can be found in the dependent claims.

The invention is based on the knowledge that a bulk heterojunction mixed layer can be produced by the serial application of solutions each of which contains only one organic semiconductor. The phase morphology of the n- and p-semiconductors is the prime consideration. To produce the desired morphology, and particularly to create the bulk heterojunction, the phase configuration must be closely controlled during the deposition and solidification periods.

A major contribution of the invention is the technologically simpler production of a bulk heterojunction cell. Although two serially applied layers are provided, the overall result is greater freedom in the choice of solvent, associated with substantial advantages for production as a whole. If the layer forming the heterojunction is fabricated as a bulk, then thorough mixing of the n-semiconductor and the p-semiconductor is present. Such fabrication is possible based on the invention because a bulk heterojunction is produced by the application of two serial layers, while at the same time, in the deposition process for each individual layer, the semiconductor materials contained in that layer can be ideally matched to the corresponding solvents. This creates the aforesaid utmost freedom in solution-forming. An essential factor is very slight dissolution of the first layer when the second layer is applied to the first. The first semiconductor layer therefore mixes at least partially with the second semiconductor layer.

Exemplary embodiments that are not limitative of the invention will be described specifically below:

The figure compares the characteristic curves of solar cells produced respectively according to the prior art and according to the invention.

The curves illustrated in the figure pertain to, on the one hand, depicted with solid circles, a solar cell produced by standard spin-coating in which both the n-semiconductor and the p-semiconductor are dissolved in a solution. The curves depicted with solid squares relate to a solar cell produced by the serial application of layers, in which the respective solutions used to produce each layer contain either an n-semiconductor alone or a corresponding p-semiconductor. The characteristic curves according to the prior art and according to the invention do not

differ substantially, whether recorded in the dark or under illumination.

The major advantages of the invention reside in the great freedom provided with respect to solvent formulation.

The fabrication of an organic solar cell with a bulk heterojunction mixed layer can proceed for example as follows: An organic semiconductor is first applied to a carrier substrate, for example glass, ITO/PEDOT:PSS. This is done for example by spin-coating, doctor-blading or printing. Particularly advantageously, the choice of the first solvent can be matched to the solubility of the first semiconductor. The first semiconductor is, for example, P3HT, PPV. The formulation of the second solution is also optimized with respect to the solubility of the second semiconductor. The second semiconductor is for example a fullerene. The first semiconductor or first semiconductor layer must, however, be slightly soluble in the solvent used for processing the second semiconductor layer. When the second solution is applied to the first layer, which is also performed by an additive application method such as doctor-blading or printing, the first semiconductor dissolves slightly and mixes with the second semiconductor. After the solvent has been evaporated, a bulk heterojunction mixed layer has formed as a result of the mixing of the very thin respective layers. In this way an ideal phase morphology can be obtained for each semiconductor, while at the same time achieving thorough intermixing.

References:

- [1] Brabec, C.J., N.S. Sariciftci and J.C. Hummelen, "Plastic solar cells," *Advanced Functional Materials* 11/1 (2001), 15-26.
- [2] Brabec et al., *Thin Solid Films* 403-404 (2002), 368-372.
- [3] Shaheen, S.E., C.J. Brabec, N.S. Scariciftci, F. Padinger, T. Fromherz and J.C. Hummelen, "2.5% efficient organic plastic solar cells," *Applied Physics Letters* 78/6 (2001), 841-3.